Chapter IV

THE DISORDERED MIND

BEFORE analyzing the treatment of the disordered mind in American fiction, let us summarize the central concepts and theories discussed in the preceding chapter.

Legal theorists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries preserved the ancient division between the totally insane and the lunatics or monomaniacs whose reason was only partially diseased. The law assumed that all men, regardless of mental defects, possess an autonomous moral faculty or disposition. The state of a man's soul could usually be deduced by examining his actions, but among the totally insane whose hearts were unenlightened by reason, this fundamental goodness or evil was beyond the scrutiny of law. Moral alienation, as opposed to mental disease, was always synonymous with guilt, since it represented a conscious and willful disobedience to divine and human law. Legally, the lunatic or victim of partial insanity was an eccentric who might not be capable of managing property but who was nevertheless responsible for criminal acts committed during lucid intervals. Such distinctions cannot be fully understood unless we
keep in mind the underlying assumption that the moral faculty, while dependent on reason and sensation for information, was at the same time immune from outside contamination.

The debate over insanity and responsibility was therefore largely confined to lunacy or monomania. After such a victim of partial insanity had committed a crime, the fundamental question was whether his unlawful act was a result of a disease which rendered impotent his innate moral sense, or whether the crime stemmed from malicious motives arising from a corrupt heart. Liberals stressed the interdependence of human faculties, but they seldom challenged the basic premise concerning the nature of guilt. For conservatives, physical alienation was never an excuse for moral alienation, though the two might become indistinguishable when the reason was badly disordered, in which case a maniac was beyond the reach of justice.

From the Shakespearean drama to the nineteenth-century opera and from the Gothic romance to the early psychological novel, two images of insanity expressed the ancient distinction between physical and moral alienation. Sometimes a sympathetic character, preferably a young woman, was pictured as suffering from mania or dementia after a traumatic experience. Ophelia was perhaps the inspiration for the succession of white-robed heroines, pathetically innocent, childlike, and unresisting, that appealed to refined sensibilities in the 1840's and 50's. But horror rather than pity was associated with the cunning lunatic, whose lucid intervals were mistaken for sanity but whose fiendish plots and eventual deliriums gave proof of a wicked soul, controlled by the devil.

If a woman lost her reason because of a lover's betrayal, or if, like Cooper's Hetty Hutter, she lacked reason from the beginning, it was often imagined that her moral sense
developed a unique purity and that, like the Pythia at Delphi, her pronouncements revealed a higher truth. Though strange and perhaps even eccentric, the demented heroine was more like an oracle or a traveler from an unknown land than like a witch. Cooper used a familiar American legend in *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish* (1829), where a girl named Ruth Heathcote, after being captured and reared by Indians, returned to her family as one alienated in mind and habits. Now, there was a striking resemblance between Ruth Heathcote and the conventional demented heroine. They shared an involuntary alienation from society, a partial loss of memory, especially for family ties and affections, and a heightened devotion to certain ideas and people, which seemed unrealistic or incongruous to parents and relatives. Their moral sense, in other words, had developed without being directed by civilization or by practical reason. The wicked lunatic, on the other hand, resembled the white renegade, who adopted the customs of savages for his own evil purposes and who used barbarous allies in carrying out schemes of private revenge. In stories, a distinction between physical and moral alienation was often symbolized by the virtuous oracle and the witch, by the captured heroine and the renegade, and by the demented lover and malicious lunatic.

Although writers of fiction generally accepted the division between partial and total insanity, we shall confine our discussion to the former, since fictional victims of dementia and total mania were seldom involved in murder. The types of insanity which attracted the attention of novelists were precisely those cases involving obsessions and delusions that, obscuring moral responsibility, occasioned the greatest debate among judges and psychologists. It is important to note that legal writers discussed insanity in terms of abstract faculties, as if the individual
could be isolated from the social forces of his environment. Imaginative writers, on the other hand, were free to explore emotional associations and social relationships; and if the fictional maniac was often a stereotype, his malady was at least presented within a wider context. When a court was faced with the problem of a man who had killed as the result of a delusion, the judge tried to determine whether the motive would be justifiable, had the delusion been real. But the novelist, by tracing the origins and by examining the implications and overtones of the delusion, had a different device for finding the degree of moral guilt.

Thus far we have used physical and moral alienation as terms to distinguish between a mind disordered by disease and a moral faculty perverted through a conscious choice of evil. Writers of fiction accepted this traditional distinction, but they tended to merge the various faculties so that intellectual and moral responses were closely related. Moral alienation became identified with rebellion against familial or social authority, an expanded meaning which had implications concerning both the causes of private revolt and the nature of guilt.

II

Conforming to the classical American belief in progress, science, and reform, Charles Brockden Brown referred to seduction and dueling as “remnants of the ancient manners of Europe,” and in 1807 he attacked the popularity of murder in fiction, which, “like all departures from nature and common sense, will have but a short reign.” Yet Brown himself, more than any other early American writer, had contributed to the fictional study of murder and abnormal psychology. Although he believed in politi-

cal and social democracy, he sensed that freedom might also imply a psychic liberation from the forces of tradition and authority. Men might, he wrote,

imagine themselves laboring for the happiness of mankind, loosening the bonds of superstition, breaking the fetters of commerce, outrooting the prejudice of birth; they may, in reality, be merely pulling down the props which uphold human society, and annihilate not merely the chains of false religion but the foundations of morality—not merely the fetters of commerce and feudal usurpations upon property, but commerce and property themselves.  

In *Wieland* (1798) Brown examined one of the results of American freedom: a European conscience, cut loose from tradition and authoritative standards, confused by the uncertainty of knowledge, might mistake dark passion for divine law. In Germany the Wielands' grandfather had enjoyed the opportunity for an orderly expression of his talents as a musician and writer, but sudden misfortune subjected his uneducated son both to economic servitude and to emotional freedom. He had been prepared for neither. Consequently, the younger Wieland found an outlet for his stifled passions in religious fanaticism, stimulated by an accidental reading of a book on the Albigenses. Emigrating to America, the son attempted to convert the Indians, made an unexpected fortune in trade, and settled with his own family in Pennsylvania, where he had freedom to practice mysterious rites in a temple he had built on a hilltop. Wieland was obsessed with a strange sense of guilt, and his moral agonies finally culminated in a case of "spontaneous combustion," which left him a mass of "crawling putrefaction." After the father's death, Clara Wieland and her brother grew up in an atmosphere of "natural religion" and were left to the guidance of their own intellects.  

The story thus far is almost an allegory of American colonial history. It includes disrupting economic changes in Europe, religious fervor which was not unrelated to these changes, frequent references to predestination and to stern self-analysis, the vision and failure of spreading truth among the savages, unexpected economic success, and even the well-known figure of a temple (or city) on the hill. The parallel continues with the disorganization and self-consumption of the original religious fanaticism and with the appropriation of the temple by rationalistic descendants. Finally, the continental Enlightenment appeared in the character of Henry Pleyel, "the champion of intellectual liberty . . . who rejected all guidance but that of his reason."

For the new generation of Wielands who sang, talked, and read in the temple scorched by their father's combustion, "time was supposed to have only new delights in store." But if Pleyel's cheerful and confident rationalism signified one meaning of eighteenth-century Europe, there was a note of ambiguity in the mysterious and anarchic figure of Carwin. Young Wieland himself was unable to escape from his father's shadow, or from an obsession with guilt and moral justification. New delights were not inevitable, therefore, in a land where the ultimate source of morality lay in the individual conscience, and where European science and revolution (Carwin) collided with a tradition of religious enthusiasm (Wieland).

Such a drama of historical allegory cannot be pushed too far, but it is important to note that Wieland is not simply an imitation of Godwin and Schiller, and that Brown was concerned with the problems of a society which imposed few limitations on self-expansion. Like Melville's Pierre, Wieland might well have been subtitled "The Ambiguities," since the characters constantly mistake one another's intentions and see neither the truth nor the
consequences of their acts: Wieland and Pleyel both thought that Clara was having a secret affair with Carwin; Clara thought that Carwin was pursuing her, when he was actually making love to her maid and using his gift of ventriloquism to avoid detection; Carwin was innocent of malicious intentions, but brought ruin to the Wieland family; and Wieland finally killed his wife and children, thinking that such a sacrifice proved his fidelity to God’s commands. These ambiguities, according to Brown, resulted from the imperfections of reason and from the devious nature of human passions.

To understand Brown’s association of conscience, insanity, and murder, it is necessary to examine certain psychological overtones of which he doubtless was unaware. Since we wish to illuminate Brown’s imaginative expression, we cannot accept ambiguity as a final conclusion concerning human motives. To analyze the symbolic language of fiction we may therefore utilize techniques unsuitable for the interpretation of historical fact.

Although the Wielands had rejected their pathetic father and had converted his consecrated temple into a kind of picnic ground, Clara and her brother showed symptoms of great anxiety and guilt. Part of this vague dread involved the memory of the elder Wieland’s death, but there was also tension in the closeness of the married brother and the unmarried sister. After a period of deep depression, Clara had a striking dream. She was walking in the evening toward her brother’s house. Suddenly she saw him in the distance, motioning that she make haste, though she did not notice that Wieland was actually standing on the opposite side of a deep pit. She would have plunged to her death, had a mysterious man (Carwin) not caught her from behind. This dream suggested that Carwin had saved Clara from an incestuous relation with her brother.
At another time, after Clara had been brooding over the memory of her father, an ominous voice called for her to stop walking toward her bedroom closet. Actually, Carwin was hiding inside, after making love to the maid, but the significant fact was that Clara had the frantic thought that her brother was in the closet, though she had no basis for such fear or suspicion. Again, the symbolism hinted at a dread of incest. That this dread was not entirely disassociated from desire was suggested when Clara confessed, after Wieland had gone insane and had killed his wife and children: "I acknowledge that my guilt surpasses that of all mankind. . . . Is there a thing in the world worthy of infinite abhorrence? It is I."

There are other indications that insanity and murder were in some way associated with a mysterious guilt, that this guilt involved Wieland's relationship with his sister, and that violence as a substitute for suppressed desires was sanctioned by a perverted conscience. When Wieland was disturbed by the thought that Clara was unsafe in the presence of Carwin, he wandered aimlessly to her house. On the way his contemplations "soared above earth and its inhabitants," and he longed to make some testimonial of his faith to God. Disappointed in finding the house empty, his ambiguous fears and desires intensified by Clara's absence, Wieland was suddenly confronted by a "luminous glowing" and was then ordered to render his wife to the Lord. After executing the command, "I lifted the corpse in my arms and laid it on the bed. I gazed upon it with delight. Such was the elation of my thoughts, that I even broke into laughter. I clapped my hands and exclaimed, 'It is done! My sacred duty is fulfilled!'"

Brown's description of the circumstances accompanying Wieland's hallucinations and murders hinted at concealed motives beyond the derangement of an intellect. The contrast between his feelings for his wife and those for his
sister appeared after the first murders, when Clara found him happy and exultant, as if some "joyous occurrence had betided." But when Wieland heard the command to kill Clara, he lifted his eyes to heaven and said, "This is too much! Any victim but this." He could murder his wife and children without remorse, for the divine will transcended human obligations, but his sister was endowed with a "sanctity and excellence surpassing human." It was as if Wieland's obsession with supernatural religion provided his suppressed desires with an outlet in a murder that removed one of the obstacles between Clara and himself. Yet an act of violence could be justified only by religious sanction, which might obscure but could never eradicate the underlying guilt of an incestuous wish. Although Wieland at first rebelled against the act, he knew that he could possess his sister only by killing her. As soon as murder and death are translated into libidinal desire, Wieland's horror and reluctance become even more understandable.

An attempt to explain Wieland wholly in terms of an incestuous relation would, of course, be misleading. For our purposes, the important fact is that Brown associated delusions with guilt and with unconscious motives, though the precise nature of Wieland's motives was never made explicit. In the freedom of the American environment, the Wielands had been left to the guidance of their own understandings; yet, as Wieland himself concluded, guilt was meaningless when determined by "halting reason." Guilt and virtue were beyond the province of simple rationalism and depended ultimately upon the complex relationships between parents and children, brother and sister, and husband and wife. Without the authority of tradition or of a respected father, Wieland searched for God's will and for moral certainty. In so doing, however, he found the justification for his own desires only. When
Wieland finally realized the true nature of his wishes and desires, he was forced, in a blinding moment of sanity, to commit suicide.

We have already noted that cases similar to Wieland's attracted the attention of British and American judges who were faced in the early nineteenth century with the problem of separating delusions from guilty or justifiable motives. In 1844 Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw of Massachusetts ruled that a murder was excusable if the killer acted under the delusive but sincere belief that he was obeying a command of God, which would supersede all human and natural laws. Such a decision rested on the assumption that supposedly valid motives never conceal a malicious heart. Judges interpreted delusions as simple mistakes in perception, which in no way obscured the purity or corruption of the moral faculty as evidenced by worthy or evil motives. Had Wieland gone before an American court in the 1840's, it is probable that his crime would have been excused as an accident, in the sense that neither his delusion nor his choice of victims was related to purposeful desire.3

Unlike judges and legal theorists, Charles Brockden Brown did not describe delusions as an isolated psychological fact. Wieland had been conditioned by his background of religious fanaticism to seek a release from his morbid guilt in violence justified by the voice of God. Carwin's mysterious ventriloquism, added to Wieland's inner tension and growing suspicion of his sister's virtue, precipitated hallucinations which allowed a momentary escape from guilt. Both the content of Wieland's delusions

3 To qualify this hypothesis, however, it is necessary to add that much would depend on the state of public opinion, the status and popularity of the victims, and the character of the judge. Yet the important point is that the assumption underlying Justice Shaw's decision also served as the foundation for the M'Naghten Rules and can be found in American decisions at least as early as 1805.
and the choice of his victims were related to illicit and unconscious desires. His moral alienation was symbolized by his final self-destruction.

A generation after the publication of *Wieland*, John Neal's Harold argued that a man like Wieland, who acted with good intentions, was innocent in the eyes of God: "And if he meant rightly, God will hold him guiltless, as he would the maniack who should dip his hands in the blood of his own mother!" But Brown was not sure about the guiltlessness of maniacs, especially those who desired the blood of their mothers. In *Edgar Huntley* (1799) he continued his exploration of criminal insanity and arrived at several pessimistic conclusions. This novel was an attack upon simple rationalism, upon the belief in moral progress, and upon naive theories of reform. A quiet, steady worker, normal to all appearances, was really an insane killer. Education, wealth, and a benevolent guardian failed to prevent the development of a criminal; Christian forgiveness, sympathy, and understanding proved to be useless when they were confronted by man's unsuspected evil. Even the rational and seemingly able Edgar Huntley was a somnambulist, and innocent individuals were murdered by savages as the result of social injustice and of a primitive desire for revenge. "How little cognizance," Brown wrote, "have men over the actions and motives of each other! How total is our blindness with regard to our own performances!" Hence, somnambulism was more than a sensational element to create dramatic suspense; it was also a symbol of the vast unconscious life of man.

For Clithero, an intelligent and aspiring peasant boy in Ireland, Mrs. Lorimer was an ideal mother image. He loved his patroness, waited on her, sought only to please her, and resisted all temptations leading to dissipation and

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to sensuality. It was a pure and intimate love between an idolized mother and a boy who was not quite a son. Such a utopian affection was clouded by the fact that Mrs. Lorimer, who was the lady of an Irish manor, had an evil twin brother who repaid her sisterly love with scorn and hatred. Through his influence with their parents, he had even violated his sister's sexual freedom by forcing her to marry a man against her choice. Significantly, Mr. Lorimer was dead before the arrival of Clithero, so that Arthur Wiatte, the brother, had become a conveniently detached father figure. Mrs. Lorimer cautioned Clithero: “Of whatever outrage he be guilty, suffer him to pass in safety. Despise me; abandon me; kill me . . . but spare, I implore you, my unhappy brother.” Thus the mother sympathized with the son's dislike for the evil father, but pleaded for understanding and tolerance.

A sign of the son's increasing maturity appeared in his love for Arthur Wiatte's illegitimate daughter, Clarice. Writers have frequently used the device of love among cousins, stepchildren, or near relations to intensify the conflict between generations, especially one between a son and various figures of authority. In this case, Clithero felt guilty in loving Clarice because of his attachment and responsibility to Mrs. Lorimer. When the kind patroness discovered the love affair and approved of it, the problem seemed to be resolved. Then Clithero had an accidental fight with Arthur Wiatte. By killing the father in self-defense, Clithero removed the only obstacle both to Mrs. Lorimer and to Clarice.

After describing this disguised parricide, Brown was primarily interested in the delusions resulting from Clithero's unconscious guilt. At first Clithero felt great anxiety over the injury he had unintentionally done to Mrs. Lorimer and Clarice. He became obsessed with the idea that his patroness might die after hearing of her brother's fate.
Using this fear as an excuse to enter her bedroom, Clithero stood beside the sleeping woman, was suddenly seized by an irresistible impulse to murder her, and picked up a dagger from the table. In the darkness he could not see that Clarice was sleeping in Mrs. Lorimer's bed. At the crucial moment Mrs. Lorimer entered the room and shrieked, whereupon Clithero discovered that he was about to kill Clarice. When he tried to explain the death of Wiatte, Mrs. Lorimer sank to the floor in a swoon, and Clithero fled to America.

As a servant in Pennsylvania, Clithero was a sober, gentle, and sometimes melancholy workman, but his guilt drove him to sleepwalking and to compulsive actions. Edgar Huntley, the young American hero, suspected him of murdering a friend named Waldegrave, but Huntley was reasonable and benevolent:

I am no stranger to your gnawing cares; to the deep and incurable despair that haunts you, to which your waking thoughts are a prey, and from which sleep cannot secure you. I know the enormity of your crime, but I know not your inducements. . . . I see proofs of that remorse which must ever be attendant on guilt. . . . I once imagined that he who killed Waldegrave inflicted the greatest possible injury on me. That was an error, which reflection has cured. Were futurity laid open to my view, and events, with their consequences, unfolded, I might see reason to embrace the assassin as my best friend.

This was the expression of an optimistic, Quakerlike morality, one which considers signs of guilt genuine repentance, and symptoms of suffering, expiation. Huntley, after hearing Clithero's story, could not understand why he should feel guilt over the killing of Wiatte: "Shall a man extract food for self-reproach from an action to which . . . he was actuated by no culpable intention?" The rational explanation for the whole affair seemed to lie in Mrs. Lorimer's "absurd opinions of the sacredness of
consanguinity,” and in Clithero’s excessive gratitude, “dread of unjust upbraiding,” and “imputation of imaginary guilt.”

When it appeared that both Mrs. Lorimer and Clarice were alive and in America, that Clithero had only imagined his patroness’ death, and that Huntley’s friend had been killed by Indians, the story of Clithero seemed to dwindle into a superficial tale of temporary madness. But a darker note was introduced in the character of Sarsefield, once the materialistic, worldly-wise lover of Mrs. Lorimer and a former teacher of Edgar Huntley. Sarsefield called Clithero a maniac, “an agent from Hell,” and “the engine of infernal malice.” After Clithero had been wounded by Indians, Sarsefield refused to help him, saying that “to prolong his life would be merely to protract his misery.”

Huntley, however, could not accept such a brutal and unenlightened view of human error. But when he saved Clithero and tried to ease the wounded man’s sense of guilt by reporting that Mrs. Lorimer was alive and in America, Huntley discovered that Sarsefield’s seeming inhumanity was justified. Roused to an unexpected fury, Clithero suddenly announced his determination to kill Mrs. Lorimer at any cost and was saved only by suicide from “lingering for years in the noisome dungeon of a hospital.” The confused Huntley had to confess to Sarsfield: “I have erred, not through sinister or malignant intentions, but from the impulse of misguided . . . but powerful benevolence. . . . I imagined that Clithero was merely the victim of erroneous education and the prejudices of his rank; that his understanding was deluded by phantoms in the mask of virtue and duty, and not, as you have strenuously maintained, utterly subverted.”

Brown concluded, in other words, that Clithero’s will and moral faculty had been alienated, though his reason was but partially deranged. If the Irishman’s understand-
ing had been "utterly subverted," the subversion was certainly not in the sense of the "wild beast" defined by law, nor were his delusions the product of his reasoning from false assumptions. In so far as Wieland was a split personality, a man who believed that he murdered from the highest possible motive, he could not distinguish between right and wrong. But Clithero suffered from no hallucinations, his sense of guilt was more persistent and conscious than Wieland's, and his madness took the form of an irresistible impulse to kill. Brown seemed to agree with Sarsfield that Clithero was a moral alien, an "engine of infernal malice" who deserved neither sympathy nor help, since his impulse to kill arose not from a deranged understanding, but rather from a perverted heart.

Yet Brown was primarily interested in developing the causes of homicidal insanity, for which purpose the devices of a novelist were at times more suggestive than were the contemporary theories of psychiatrists. Instead of explaining Clithero's insanity by means of a head injury, erroneous education or religious beliefs, intense study, or economic misfortune, Brown emphasized the ambiguous emotions of a foster son. Without embarking upon an extravagant Freudian analysis, we may assume that Brown sensed the vague sexual tensions between parents and children. Arthur Mervyn was revolted by his father's marriage to a young servant girl, whom he had previously seen in intercourse with a neighbor boy. His fear of a possible incestuous relationship with this servant-girl-mother contributed to his moral outrage and to his flight from home. Ormond's efficiency and seeming benevolence was a contrast to the disability and drunkenness of Constantia Dudley's father; after murdering Dudley in

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order to possess Constantia, Ormond himself became a threatening father image. Whenever Brown described deep personal conflicts, he suggested an ambivalent sexual attraction and aggression between the generations of a single family.

Clithero's extreme guilt after killing Arthur Wiatte was precisely that of a son who had murdered his father. The central fact was that his relationship with Mrs. Lorimer had suddenly changed with her brother's accidental death. Clithero was in love with Clarice, a girl of his own generation, but he could marry her only if he escaped the guilt implied by the new mother relationship. Hence the murder of Mrs. Lorimer would prove that the killing of Wiatte had been truly an accident and that it had not been a primitive, Oedipal murder. In another sense, the killing of Mrs. Lorimer would be the only possible way for Clithero to preserve the former relationship, which had been untainted by elements of blood and sex. Clithero rationalized his impulse as an attempt to protect Mrs. Lorimer from anguish and grief; Huntley interpreted the madness as a desire to escape from a patroness' disapproval; but both explanations became meaningless when Clithero persisted in his efforts to murder. In Brown's completed picture, the essential elements contributing to homicidal insanity were an abnormal devotion to a mother, an excessive desire for approval, and an overpowering sense of guilt. The horror and shock which Clithero felt upon discovery by Mrs. Lorimer did not result from remorse, but from the hideous mistake he was about to make. Had he killed Clarice, the path to the future would have been cut off, he would have been condemned in his own eyes as an Oedipal murderer, and even matricide could not have saved him from the multiplying guilt. In both Wieland and Edgar Huntley an original murder is
linked with a concealed and unlawful desire, which, for the diseased mind, necessitates a second murder as the only means of removing an unbearable guilt.

III

The plot of Cooper's *Lionel Lincoln* (1825) is tortuous and illogical, but like the more abbreviated symbols of other writers, Cooper's plots convey important attitudes and relationships. *Lionel Lincoln* traces the development of a specific case of monomania from the human sins of lust, jealousy, and avarice, which, in Cooper's philosophy, were responsible for most of the evil and unhappiness in the world.

Making the conventional male error, the elder Lionel Lincoln had sired a bastard named Job Pray, whose feeble-mindedness was a natural mark of his origin. The mother, Abigail Pray, was jealous when Sir Lionel later married a girl named Priscilla, who gave birth to a legitimate son, Lionel the younger (we shall refer to the son as "Lionel" and to the father as "Sir Lionel" or "Ralph"). It so happened that Abigail's guardian was also Sir Lionel's aunt, Mrs. Lechmere, a cold-blooded, avaricious woman with eyes firmly set on the Lincoln estate in England. She had hoped to entangle Sir Lionel with her own daughter, and was outraged when he married Priscilla, who had also been her ward. When Sir Lionel went to England to claim his rightful estate, he foolishly left his wife under the care of Mrs. Lechmere and Abigail Pray, both of whom desired her destruction. Driven by jealousy and greed, Abigail and Mrs. Lechmere plotted murder, but were saved the trouble when Priscilla contracted smallpox. Cooper could imagine a terrifying feminine death-wish: "Vain, weak and foolish as I had been," said Abigail, "never did I regard my own fresh beauty with half the inward pleasure that I looked upon the foulness of my rival."
When Sir Lionel returned from England, he was told that his wife had died in giving birth to the offspring of an adulterous romance. Mrs. Lechmere had planned this deception to drive the disillusioned husband toward her own daughter or toward Abigail. But despite his original sexual transgression, Sir Lionel was stunned by the information and driven insane. In this instance, insanity resulted from the trauma of thinking that his wife was unfaithful, even though the victim had himself put the complex forces of evil into motion.

The actual story occurred some fifteen years later, after Sir Lionel, who had escaped from an English insane asylum, had returned to America under the name of “Ralph.” Feeling that he had suffered intolerable slavery, Ralph identified England and the king with the demons at the asylum, his monomania including both a desire for political rebellion and a thirst for revenge against Mrs. Lechmere. Cooper thus gave family conflicts a wider social significance, as young Lionel, a Loyalist, is ranged against his insane father and half-wit brother, both of whom supported the radical cause. Neither side in the Revolution was described as especially virtuous or evil, though violence and even sadism resulted from the struggle. The novel is, in fact, filled with murderous intentions. When Lionel learned that his mother had supposedly been seduced and had died in childbirth, he swore to kill the adulteror. Finally discovering that he had been deceived, Ralph tried to kill Abigail, his former mistress, whereupon Lionel was saved only at the last moment from slaying his father in Abigail’s defense. To keep Lionel from parricide, Cooper allowed a keeper from the asylum to deliver the fatal blow, adding enigmatically that the keeper never returned to England: “Perhaps he was conscious of a motive, that none but an inward monitor might detect.”

With the exception of a few background scenes of
Revolutionary violence, the tale was strictly limited to a tight family situation wherein characters were related either by blood or by sex. The division of the generations was not so important, however, as the division between the two sexes. Every female character was in some way related to or controlled by Mrs. Lechmere, whose subtle evil transcended the forthright criminality of Cooper’s worst villains. In an age of increasing deference to the gentle and noble sex, nothing was so striking in this novel as the corrosive feminine dishonesty and the vicious but hidden female aggressiveness. Lionel’s mother and bride, though pure in heart, were, respectively, the ward and granddaughter of Mrs. Lechmere; in the plot, they were only facets of the central, female nature. It is important that Lionel, like his father, believed that his mother had committed adultery; and his marriage to Cecil was planned and blessed by Mrs. Lechmere.

The essential plot, then, may be interpreted as a struggle between the masculine and feminine sides of a family, the former being decidedly the weaker of the two. Young Lionel’s quest was, in effect, an attempt to join forces with his father against the power of feminine evil. But Sir Lionel had already been reduced to a state of impotent mania, since woman’s nature is at once so pure and deceptive that Mrs. Lechmere could effectively mobilize the dead Priscilla as a fifth-column agent. Just as unwittingly, her granddaughter, Cecil, helped to steer the son away from his father.

Sir Lionel had committed an original sin, but his subsequent sufferings were out of proportion to his evil, for, despite his monomania, he never killed or injured his opponents, his desire for revenge being deflected by political obsession. Insanity was clearly a consequence of evil and not a source of it.

The relations between young Lionel and his father grew
increasingly ambiguous as Ralph's mental alienation became more complete. When Lionel first beheld the mysterious Ralph, walking like a phantom through the fog, he was tempted "to kneel, and ask a benediction." The son said that colonists should be as loyal to the king as children to a common parent, though Ralph ironically accused the king of being an unnatural father. After Lexington and Concord, Ralph saved his son's life, and Lionel temporarily abandoned his bride to go with Ralph in order to learn the secret of his past. Yet the son was constantly confused, unable to discover his true position. He was torn between the bad mother-image of Mrs. Lechmere and the good mother-image of Cecil, who together represented the possibilities of feminine nature. In a sense, the character, Job Pray, was a projection of Lionel's loyalty to his father. When Job died of smallpox, Lionel was finally committed to the feminine side, which Cooper purified by Mrs. Lechmere's death and by Abigail's remorse. The parricide was put into execution by a stranger, but the actual intention was Lionel's.

Such a lengthy analysis is necessary to show the important assumptions in this novel concerning insanity and aggression. The impulse to kill and destroy emerges from innate passions, especially from greed. Man's weakness in abusing the sexual relation opens him to attack and aligns the sexes against each other. The father, who suffered most, was a helpless ineffectual, not basically evil but unable to resist sexual desire, suspicion, and jealousy. The son's attempt to identify himself with the father was frustrated by the latter's inherent weakness and by the dual potentiality of woman. Woman here has the terrible and supreme power over sexual fidelity which may enable even a loyal and loving wife to contribute to her husband's destruction. Yet, in the final picture, the husband was by no means blameless. The son who knelt at his
father's feet and gave him unswerving support was the half-wit Job.

There was nothing new in Cooper's theory of the passions or in his explanation of Ralph's insanity. But the outlets for passion and obsession were determined by a specific social situation, which had a peculiar slackness and ambiguity about it. American society in Lionel Lincoln was a society where men had to travel great distances to claim inherited fortunes, where the status of women was vague, where an emphasis on sexual morality opened new sources of feminine power, where paternal authority and tradition dissipated or became perverted, where, instead of conserving the past and protecting the weaker females, the fathers destroyed the past and eventually succumbed to woman's strength. Loyal to his king, yet the son of a radical, Lionel searched for the firm, reassuring voice of a patriarch. He found a wild-eyed fool and discovered that he must choose between half-witted obeisance to a pathetic lunatic and submission to an enigmatic ideal of woman.

IV

In the novels discussed so far, insanity was precipitated by traumatic experiences which upset the balance between an individual's self-ideal and his actual status as reflected in his social relations. Thus Wieland's intimate relations with Clara seemed securely innocent until Carwin's presence made the brother suddenly aware of his sister's sexuality. As long as Arthur Wiatte lived, Clithero could love his patroness without guilt, and Sir Lionel Lincoln could excuse his early transgression until he thought his wife unfaithful. In the deranged mind there was a curious perversion of the self-ideal, which, instead of compelling conformity to accepted standards of virtue, permitted the liberation of darker passions, a massing of latent hatreds.
which might surge upward in a blinding monomania. If the ideal heroine reacted to trauma by stringing flowers through her hair and wasting away to innocent and ethereal death, a stroke of lightning might also sear a character's finer affections, igniting his frozen and half-forgotten depths of evil.

"A diseased self-esteem," said William Gilmore Simms, "is apt to be an active condition in the mind of most lunatics, and has contributed not a little to their mental overthrow." Many of the symptoms of insanity, Simms thought, were efforts to startle other people in order to win recognition by any means. But a monomaniac, whose aggression took a specific direction, could be understood only by discovering the relation between some trauma and his previous state of insecurity.

In *The Partisan* (1835) Simms explored the causes of insanity in a character named Frampton. Frampton was a Carolinian whose pregnant wife had been tortured and brutally killed by a gang of Tories. The backwoods partisan warfare in 1780 was in truth characterized by sadism and atrocities of this kind. But Simms was not content with a simple plot of revenge. Since Frampton had never been especially close to his wife, the shock of her ruthless murder was accentuated by self-accusing memories of his own cruelty. He prayed to her, asking forgiveness for his neglect and unkindness. He became very sentimental when he thought of her, perhaps unconsciously recalling that he had himself once wished her death. Such extreme guilt was, of course, a blow to Frampton's self-esteem. Feeling that he must prove that he had not been unkind to his wife and that he had not desired her death, Frampton lived only for revenge and for self-justification.

Hiding in a swamp and hunted by Loyalist war parties, the maniac killed and mutilated stray soldiers. When he found an injured Tory named Clough, he pulled the
man's bandages open and drove his weapon into the wounds. After another Tory cried for mercy, "the speech was silenced, as, crushing through bone and brain, the thick sword dug its way down into the very eyes of the pleader. The avenger knelt on the senseless body... and poured forth above it a strain of impious Thanksgiving to Heaven for so much granted and gained of the desired vengeance."

Simms was ahead of his time in attempting to provide a psychological explanation for the extreme depths of human cruelty; but in 1837, two years after *The Partisan*, Robert Montgomery Bird described a similar case of monomania in *Nick of the Woods*. Nathan Slaughter was a Quaker farmer living on the Pennsylvania frontier in the late eighteenth century. When a party of Shawnees came to his farm, Nathan gave them his knife and gun to show that he was a friend. The Shawnee chief answered by killing Nathan's wife, mother, and five children. As Slaughter later said:

When thee has children that Injuns murder, as thee stands by,—a wife that clasps thee legs in the writhings of death,—her blood, spouting up to thee bosom, where she has slept—an old mother calling thee to help her in the death struggle!—then, friend, then thee may see—then thee may know—then thee may feel—then thee may call theeself wretched.

Nathan's resulting monomania was complicated by a racial and religious implication. On the one hand, Indians were presented as only half-human and consequently easier to hate and kill, but on the other hand, Nathan Slaughter was a Quaker, who did not believe in physical resistance to bloodshed although he tried to prevent the massacre. Where Simms utilized a husband's guilt to explain a pathological sadism, Bird rather mechanically relied on a head injury. Nathan survived a brutal scalping
which presumably shattered his Quaker convictions and which provided him with the distinguishing marks of a monomaniac, including epileptic fits.

Moving to the Kentucky frontier, Slaughter became a split personality, at once a meek Quaker hunter, tormented by the settlers for his refusal to fight Indians, and also the mysterious Jibbenainosay, or Nick of the Woods, who murdered Indians indiscriminately, leaving them scalped and with a bloody cross on their chests. This double life and hidden identity, intended by Bird to add to the narrative suspense, also dramatized the morality of killing. It was the accepted attitude in the Kentucky settlement that Indians were vicious animals that had to be exterminated. But Nathan was not part of the community justifying racial murder, and thus he had to make a compromise with his own conscience.

Creating his own morality, Nathan Slaughter was a kind of superman as well as maniac. His physical skills were easily equal to those of Leatherstocking, while his undeviating and unquenchable urge to murder gave him an added supernatural aura. In his maddened state, revenge was holy, plunging a knife into the breast of an Indian was a divine ecstasy, and the spirit of Jibbenainosay could not rest until he held the bloody scalp of Wenonga, the chief, beside the dried locks and ringlets of his own murdered family. Yet Nathan, the timid hunter, the gentle Quaker, guilt-ridden and apologetic when he killed an Indian to save the hero's life, argued against revenge and against the killing of killers. Thus it was that Nathan maintained his social position as a moralizing dissenter, a Christian outcast, though his secret, savage deeds evoked a horror even in the hearts of blood-stained frontiersmen.

Such a division was more than mere hypocrisy or literary convention. It was a portrayal of the intricate relation between aggression and conscience, and between group
violence and the moral alien. By his Quaker protest against the rationalized values of the frontier community Nathan could justify a more extreme aggression on the personal level. He could achieve an intimate satisfaction from his own private and bloody rites, at a time when social values were so ambiguous that no clear distinction could be made between pathologic and normal violence. Even though Nathan Slaughter killed Indians, he was essentially a moral outcast, seeking personal revenge in a land disrupted by group warfare.

In his literary portrait, the monomaniac usually possessed acute senses, as did Nathan Slaughter, or a powerful intellect, as did John Neal's Harold. The murderer in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" described his sensitive hearing as proof of his sanity. But if the monomaniac appeared supernormal in certain of his senses and faculties, the relationship between his conscience and passions had been distorted. Simms and Bird, who were principally interested in the mechanisms of guilt and justification, described maniacs who consciously killed for vengeance. Frampton might be compelled to pray to his dead wife and Nathan might condemn the frontier's hatred of Indians, but theirs was no devious route in choosing Tories and Shawnees for private revenge. But Poe, who brought a new dimension to the concept of monomania, emphasized a total perversion of the will. His killers were frustrated, impulsive men, seething with an undetermined hatred, blindly groping for an object to destroy. In Poe's deceptive, moon-lit world, the nerves and senses were tautly drawn to a point where their very rigidity had snapped the fragile web of logic, even though the intellect retained its capacity for planned action. It was not simply a question of killing Indians or Tories because they had brought death and grief, since the mind was incapable of such conscious deduction. Instead, unrelated objects advanced in the con-
consciousness and stood glaring and unnaturally bright in the reflected light of anger. They provoked and irritated a deranged mind—like a bull-fighter’s cape.

The images which precipitated violence were the haunting eyes of an old man, the bright, clean teeth of a girl named Berenice, or a sinister cat named Pluto. There was a concentration on the flickering and shifting light on the surface of consciousness, as seen from the slightly distorted perspective of a man submerged in the fluid of passion. Poe did not enlighten the reader concerning the original frustration or desire. We are presented with a character suffering from a serious but obscure mental disorganization, his essential symptom being a rupture in the relation between logical thought and emotional feeling. As the tension increased, escape seemed to lie only in an act of violent aggression. A plan crystallized, and a chain of ideas led irresistibly to an action which was both illogical and beyond the understanding. Sometimes, this violence was so horrifying to the normal consciousness that, like Egaeus in “Berenice” (1835), the man could not remember it. And yet the act brought a relaxation, a temporary calmness and rationality, perhaps even satisfaction and pride.

The central characteristics of most of Poe’s insane killers were a feeling of guilt before the murder, a conviction that violence was the only solution for some deep emotional problem, and a relief from tension and anxiety in the act itself. Thus Egaeus did not openly desire to kill Berenice, nor are we told why he feared her. Yet he felt that the possession of her teeth could restore him to reason and peace of mind. It is fairly obvious that the protagonist in “The Black Cat” (1843) in some way associated the cat with his wife, though he did not himself recognize this

identification. When his obsession and anxiety only increased after he blinded the cat, he hanged the creature as if it were a criminal to be justly executed. That the animal was not the real object of his fear and hatred was evidenced by the arrival of a second cat. It seemed to be only the accidental interference of his wife which diverted his passions, yet in that moment the identification was suddenly complete. He could justify the murder of his wife by her annoying interruption as he was righteously pursuing the cat, but the emotional relief and satisfaction lay in the realization of his original desire.

It is important that most of Poe's unhappy maniacs were temporarily liberated by an act of violence. Like Nathan Slaughter and Frampton, they were freed from anxiety and guilt, from a frowning conscience or from moral insecurity. Freedom does, after all, lie in action. But action may be restricted or guided by parents, society, and natural forces. An escape from these restrictions might mean slavery to individual passions, but this, in turn, might be the essence of a particular kind of freedom. A man who felt a crushing weight of guilt or fear might seek his liberty in a supreme act of will, focusing his passionate energy on one frustrating image, and, with a concentrated effort, break through the net of confining powers.

V

America proclaimed itself a land of liberty. It was a land where men had once dissolved political bands and had accused a single man of absolute tyranny, intolerable abuse, and usurpation of power, though the king was scarcely responsible for the charges. The king, however, was being tried before the Supreme Judge, and there was no appeal. Yet this quest for liberty could lead to an increasing denial of limits. "Who's to doom," Captain
Ahab asked, "when the judge himself is dragged to the bar?"

Opposed to the fathers, the laws, the kings, and the gods, there was always the wounded, intimate self, the animal being that yearned for unrestricted expression, for an expansive gushing forth, an acting, grasping, possession of the world. In America there were many selves expanding, receiving fuel from claims in land, clothes, banks, or, vicariously, in the gratifying national extension and enrichment. But then expanding selves can rub against one another, and even without such friction, a few remaining limits irritate and challenge ascending spirits. If man at last seemed free, free to plot his course or free to throw the instruments overboard, could a man, an American in the nineteenth century, strike out and kill all opposing forces? Could one supreme act of will shatter the complex and shifting images of restriction? When a baby attempts to claim the world, his desires are blunted and driven underground by a ruling father. For Americans, at least, one father was dead.

A monomaniac may be driven by an irresistible impulse, but he imagines at times that this impulse is an expression of his true self and that each act of murder is an act of freedom. Only in the wildest insanity, however, could a man strike out to obliterate every opposing will. From the time of the first tantrum rebuked, the mind incorporates certain restricting and guiding forces. Hence the monomaniac has an obsession to kill Tories, Indians, or black cats. "Human madness," said Melville, "is often-times a cunning and most feline thing. When you think it fled, it may have become transfigured into some still subtler form."

In America the literary study of monomania reached its highest point, of course, when the "Pequod" sailed out
from Nantucket across the watery part of the world. In his "masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness," Ahab was beyond the secure, yet restrictive, shore of civilization, and lived for the supreme act. Unlike Frampton and Nathan Slaughter, Ahab's initial trauma had not involved injury to an extended self, in the form of a murdered wife or children. The injury had penetrated directly into the heart of Ahab's soul, insulting his masculine power, ruining the source of his assurance and pride. Ahab's imagination enhanced the whale with supernatural significance. As long as Moby-Dick lived, there was a force to humble Ahab's manhood and to mock his pretensions of freedom.

It is simple enough to say that Moby-Dick represents a father, or God, or Nature, or the Unknowable, but Ahab's voyage was not an intellectual quest. The whale was not a man nor an idea, but a feeling. Killing the whale was not a matter of subduing Nature or of revenge against a castrating father. It was the attempted assertion of a wounded self at bay. Moby-Dick embodied the feeling of restriction and limitation, external power, the essence of every thwarting, baffling, hurting thing, supreme and concentrated, malign and maddeningly confident. For a lesser injury or a lesser hatred, a black cat or an Indian might suffice. But for Ahab, who had a majesty above all ordinary supermen and maniacs, no simple murder could avenge such a profound grievance or pacify such a towering aggression. It was Melville's genius to avoid an allegory of parricide and to choose a whale, whose size and power could signify the inclusiveness of Ahab's feeling and the enormity of his challenge.

In the fictional treatment of monomania it was generally assumed that innate passions had the capacity for causing violent aggression, especially when directed and stimulated by reason and imagination. Normally, these
aggressive passions were subdued and controlled either by
divine conscience or by inculcated social values. Never­
theless, some trauma or injury might provide a justifica­
tion for violence and an immediate object for aggression.
The victim would feel that his ego had been outrageously
violated, that the ordinary codes had been broken, and
that his was a special case. In addition, he might have re­
ceived a physical injury like scalping or the loss of a leg,
or he might have had a previous guilt or anxiety which
would contribute to his madness.

In so far as the monomaniac had lucid intervals, he
might technically be able to distinguish right from wrong,
although he created his own morality with respect to the
hated object. Freedom and self-esteem could only come
from yielding to the desire to act, or to kill. Conformity
to traditional or social prohibitions would only be slavery
to external force and a denial of inner certainty. Even
though the monomaniac might appear normal, as Ahab
did on shore, he was in this sense driven by an irresistible
impulse. Thus knowledge could coexist with deep emo­
tional abnormality.

Writers often expressed sympathy for these driven and
obsessed souls, who were seldom described as responsible
criminals. And yet they had lost their instruments of
navigation, they blindly sailed away from the light and
warmth of society and attacked white monsters in a black
and icy sea.

VI

At the cost of repetition, it seems appropriate at this
point to summarize certain fictional ideas and associations
concerning insanity and murder, including their similarity
to and difference from contemporary legal conceptions.
Although we have analyzed only a small sampling of
American fiction from 1798 to 1860, similar themes and
ideas may be found in the works of many other writers. In a discussion of the fictional treatment of insanity it would be possible to stress minor differences in interpretation, to show, for example, the early influence of Pinel and Rush or the gradual acceptance of Esquirol's classification of symptoms. For the limited purposes of this study, however, it seems more important to note the divergence between the basic assumptions in jurisprudence and fiction.

An American judge in the first half of the nineteenth century might have defined legal guilt as a causal connection between an unlawful act and the malicious disposition of an inner, nonintellectual faculty, which might variously be called the heart, will, or moral sense. Whether the will and moral sense were thought to be united or independent was relatively unimportant in this sense, since the final seat of moral action was autonomous, regardless of terminology. It was, essentially, the "heart," as described in scholastic philosophy, a philosophy still uncontaminated by sensational psychology. For the theologian, of course, a malicious heart was guilty even if it failed to produce illicit acts, but the law assumed that guilt could not be punished unless made manifest in crime.

In the legal view, insanity was an impairment of the understanding in varying degrees and could be classed with other accidental diseases. It presented a problem in criminal law because a diseased intellect tended to obscure the causal connection between an evil heart and an unlawful act. Such a connection was impossible to establish in cases of total insanity, but monomania, or "reasoning madness," which often involved systematized delusions, seemed to imply that the understanding was only partially damaged, and that certain actions, at least, reflected the true nature and quality of the heart. From the Hadfield
case in 1800 to the general acceptance of the M'Naghten Rules, partial insanity was a subject of dispute in criminal law. There was general agreement, however, that moral guilt could be theoretically distinguished from a physical alienation of mind. An evil will was only accidentally associated with mental disorder.

If writers of fiction stressed the innocence of the demented heroine, they also tended to identify murder with monomania. We have already seen that four ideas concerning insanity and aggression were at least implicit in most of the works discussed. First, the immediate cause of monomania was a traumatic experience which destroyed an individual's ideal conception of his own moral status. Whenever judges equated insanity with physical disease, the selection of victims was viewed as fortuitous, at least in the same sense that plagues and fevers disregard human standards of morality. In fiction, however, monomania was not amoral, since only certain individuals having specific ideals and temperaments could respond to shock with pathologic aggression. Had Nathan Slaughter not been a Quaker, for instance, he could have joined the Kentuckians in their war against Indians without experiencing inner conflict. If Wieland had been a deist, he would not have been tempted to hear the voice of God. From its very inception, then, partial insanity was related to the nature and content of an individual's moral faculty.

The second idea follows logically from the first. An insane murderer's delusions and choice of victims were not matters of chance, but were rather determined by the inner disposition of his heart. This meant that no sharp line could be drawn between physical and moral alienation, since physical symptoms, such as impairment of reason, were a reflection of moral conflict. We should note again, however, that total insanity, which was seldom related to murder or crime in fiction, was described as
physical alienation. Writers did not extend the moral connotation from monomania to dementia.

Third, moral alienation was given a wider meaning by its association with social isolation. Monomania often implied a revolt against primary obligations and restrictions, a revolt bringing about a disintegration of parental authority, tradition, and social order, as we have seen in the analysis of Lionel Lincoln. Finally, monomania resulted automatically in its own punishment, usually by suffering and death. Although Nick of the Woods is a significant exception, guilt was often synonymous with self-deception and final destruction.

Whereas judges and moral philosophers had tried to clarify and separate the human faculties, these four ideas reflect a belief in a unified personality, whose reason was merely an instrument of will and desire. A malicious heart might conceal itself from consciousness by generating delusions or specious motives for evil acts. The depraved soul mistook the workings of Satan for divine grace. Yet this theory, while resembling the ancient doctrine of total depravity, was opposed to a fundamental assumption of jurisprudence. If the faculties were so intimately and subtly joined, good intentions and worthy motives were not necessarily proof of innocence. In other words, the guilt of an insane murderer could not be deduced from external circumstances or measured by the standards of normal men. But judges, of course, were denied the privileges of novelists. They could neither scrutinize the inner soul of criminals nor assume that moral guilt would inevitably bring its own punishment.